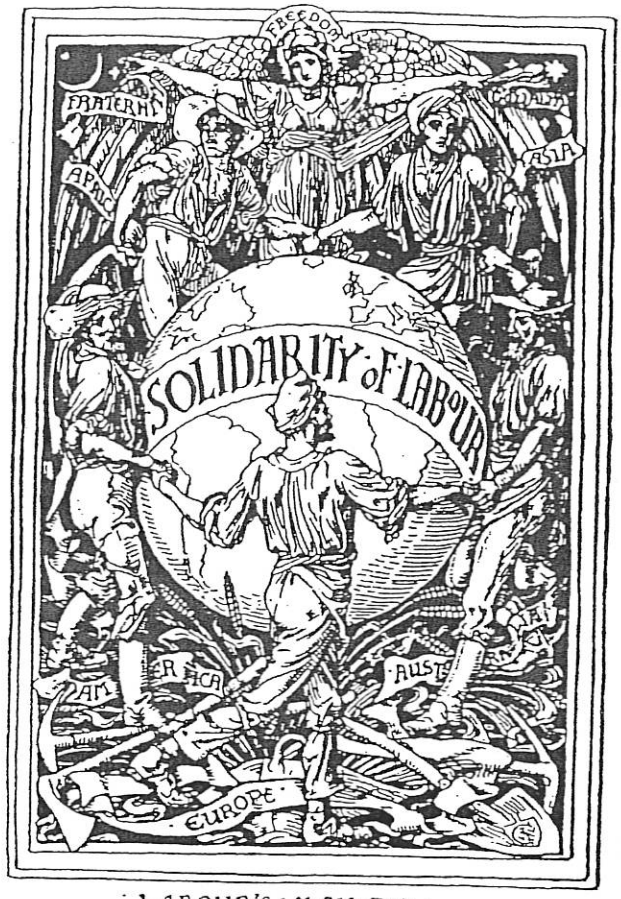
May Day

A BEGINNING

The Soviet government parades missiles and marches soldiers on **May Day**. The American government has called **May First** "Loyalty Day" and associates it with militarism. The real meaning of this day has been obscured by the designing propaganda of both governments. The truth of **May Day** is totally different. To the history of **May Day** there is a **Green** side and there is a **Red** side.

Under the rainbow, our methodology must be colorful. **Green** is a relationship to the earth and what grows therefrom. **Red** is a relationship to other people and the blood spilt there among. **Green** designates life with only necessary labor; **Red** designates death with surplus labor. **Green** is natural appropriation; **Red** is social expropriation. **Green** is husbandry and nurturance; **Red** is proletarianization and prostitution. **Green** is useful activity; **Red** is useless toil. **Green** is creation of desire; **Red** is class struggle. **May Day** is both.



LABOUR'S MAY DAY
DEDICATED TO THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD

THE GREEN

Once upon a time, long before Weinberger bombed north Africans, before the Bank of Boston laundered money, or Reagan honored the Nazi war dead, the earth was blanketed by a broad mantle of forests. As late as Caesar's time a person might travel through the woods for two months without gaining an unobstructed view of the sky. The immense forests of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America provided the atmosphere with oxygen and the earth with nutrients. Within the woodland ecology our ancestors did not have to work the graveyard shift, or to deal with flexitime, or work from Nine to Five. Indeed, the native Americans whom Captain John Smith encountered in 1606 only worked four hours a week. The origin of **May Day** is to be found in the Woodland Epoch of history.

In Europe, as in Africa, people honored the woods in many ways. With the leafing of the trees in spring, people celebrated "the fructifying spirit of vegetation," to use the phrase of J..G. Frazer, the anthropologist. They did this in **May**, a month named after **Maia**, the mother of all the gods according to the ancient Greeks, giving birth even to Zeus.

The Greeks had their sacred groves, the Druids their oak worship, the Romans their games in honor of Floralia. In Scotland the herdsmen formed circles and danced around fires. The Celts lit bonfires in hilltops to honor their god, Beltane. In the Tyrol people let their dogs bark and made music with pots and pans. In Scandinavia fires were lit and the witches came out.

Everywhere people "went **a-Maying**" by going into the woods and bringing back leaf, bough, and blossom to decorate their persons, homes, and loved ones with **green** garlands. Outside theater was performed with characters like "Jack-In-the-Green" and the "Queen of the **May**." Trees were planted. Maypoles were erected. Dances were danced. Music was played. Drinks were drunk, and love was made. Winter was over, spring had sprung.

The history of these customs is complex and affords the student of the past with many interesting insights into the history of religion, gender, reproduction, and village ecology. Take Joan of Arc who was burned in **May** 1431. Her inquisitors believed she was a witch. Not far from her birthplace, she told the judges, *"there is a tree that they call 'The Ladies Tree' - others call it 'The Fairies Tree.' It is a beautiful tree, from which comes the* ***Maypole***. *I have sometimes been to play with the young girls to make garlands for Our Lady of Domremy. Often I have heard the old folk say that the fairies haunt this tree...."* In the general indictment against Joan, one of the particulars against her was dressing like a man. The paganism of Joan's heresy originated in the Old Stone Age when religion was animistic and shamans were women and men.

Monotheism arose with the Mediterranean empires. Even the most powerful Roman Empire had to make deals with its conquered and enslaved peoples (syncretism). As it destroyed

SOME MAY GAMES

Egg Toss: Form teams of two. Each team takes one egg. Partners face each other. Toss and catch the egg. Then take one step backwards. Repeat until only one whole egg remains. It belongs to the winning team.

Slow Bike Race: Make a start and a finish line. Mount bikes and on signal race slow. You may not touch the ground or other contestants. The last to finish wins.

Hecking the Orange: Form teams of two. One partner holds orange between chin and collar bone, and second partner takes orange with chin and collar bone. No hands!

Egg and Spoon Race: Make start and finish lines. Put egg in spoon. Race, without touching the egg, carrying it in the spoon. First to finish with egg in spoon wins.

Three-legged Race: Form teams of two. Tie your left leg to partner's right leg. Race. First to finish line wins.

Maypole Dance: Attach ribbons to top of Maypole. Dancers hold other end of ribbon. Alternate dancers face each other. Dance in direction you're facing, alternatively going over and under the ribbons of opposing dancers. Thus, weave the ribbons around the Maypole. To unweave, reverse the dance.

some customs, it had to accept or transform others. Thus, we have Christmas Trees. May Day became a day to honor the saints, Phillip and James, who were unwilling slaves to Empire. James the Less neither drank nor shaved. He spent so much time praying that he developed huge callouses on his knees, likening them to camel legs. Philip was a lazy guy. When Jesus said *"Follow me"* Philip tried to get out of it by saying he had to tend to his father's funeral, and it was to this excuse that the Carpenter's Son made his famous reply, *"Let the dead bury the dead."* James was stoned to death, and Philip was crucified head downwards. Their martyrdom introduces the **Red** side of the story, even still the **Green** side is preserved because, according to the Floral Directory, the tulip is dedicted to Philip and bachelor buttons to James.

The farmers, workers, and child-bearers (laborers) of the Middle Ages had hundreds of holydays which preserved the **May Green**, despite the attack on peasants and witches. Despite the complexities, whether **May Day** was observed by sacred or profane ritual, by pagan or Christian, by magic or not, by straights or gays, by gentle or calloused hands, it was always a celebration of all that is free and life-giving in the world. That is the **Green** side of the story. Whatever else it was, it was not a time to work.

Therefore, it was attacked by the authorities. The repression had begun with the burning of women and it continued in the 16th century when America was "discovered," the slave trade was begun, and nation-states and capitalism were formed. In 1550 an Act of Parliament demanded that Maypoles be destroyed, and it outlawed games. In 1644 the Puritans in England abolished **May Day** altogether. To these work-ethicists the festival was obnoxious for paganism and worldliness. Philip Stubs, for example, in Anatomy of Abuses (1585) wrote of the Maypole, *"and then fall they to banquet and feast, to leape and daunce about it, as the Heathen people did at the dedication of their Idolles."* When a Puritan mentioned "heathen" we know genocide was not far away. According to the excellent slide show at the Quincy Historical Society, 90% of the Massachusetts people, including chief Chicatabat, died from chicken pox or small pox a few years after the Puritans landed in 1619. The Puritans also objected to the unrepressed sexuality of the day. Stubs said, *"of fourtie, threescore, or an hundred maides going to the wood, there have scarcely the third part of them returned home againe as they went."*

The people resisted the repressions. Thenceforth, they called their **May** sports, the "Robin Hood Games." Capering about with sprigs of hawthorn in their hair and bells jangling from their knees, the ancient characters of **May** were transformed into an outlaw community, Maid Marions and Little Johns. The **May** feast was presided over by the "Lord of Misrule," "the King of Unreason," or the "Abbot of Inobedience." Washington Irving was later to write that the feeling for May "has become chilled by habits of gain and traffic." As the gainers and traffickers sought to impose the regimen of monotonous work, the people responded to preserve their holyday. Thus began in earnest the Red side of the story of **May Day**. The struggle was brought to Massachusetts in 1626.

THOMAS MORTON OF MERRY MOUNT

In 1625 Captain Wollaston, Thomas Morton, and thirty others sailed from England and months later, taking their bearings from a red cedar tree, they disembarked in Quincy Bay. A year later Wollaston, impatient for lucre and gain, left for good to Virginia. Thomas Morton settled in Passonaggessit which he named Merry Mount. The land seemed a "Paradise" to him. He wrote, there are *"fowls in abundance, fish in multitudes, and I discovered besides, millions of turtle doves on the green boughs, which sat pecking of the full, ripe, pleasant grapes that were supported by the lusty trees, whose fruitful load did cause the arms to bend."*

On **May Day**, 1627, he and his Indian friends, stirred by the sound of drums, erected a Maypole eighty feet high, decorated it with garlands, wrapped it in ribbons, and nailed to its top the antlers of a buck. Later he wrote that he *"sett up a Maypole upon the festival day of Philip and James, and therefore brewed a barrell of excellent beare."* A ganymede sang a Bacchanalian song. Morton attached to the pole the first lyric verses penned in America which concluded,

With the proclamation that the first of May
At Merry Mount shall be kept holly day

The Puritans at Plymouth were opposed to the **May Day**. They called the **Maypole** "an Idoll" and named Merry Mount "Mount Dagon" after the god of the first ocean-going imperialists, the Phoenicians. More likely, though the Puritans

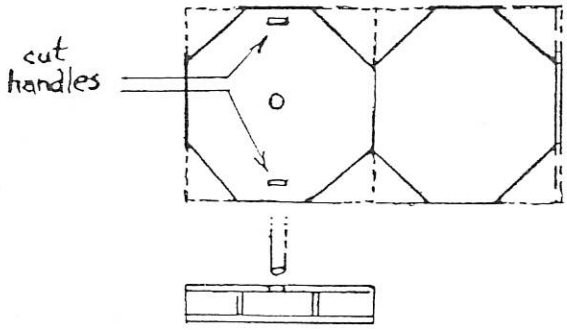
were the imperialists, not Morton, who worked with slaves, servants, and native Americans, person to person. Everyone was equal in his "social contract." Governor Bradford wrote, *"they allso set up a* ***Maypole,*** *drinking and dancing aboute it many days togeather, inviting the Indean women for their consorts, dancing and frisking togither (like so many faires, or furies rather) and worse practises."*

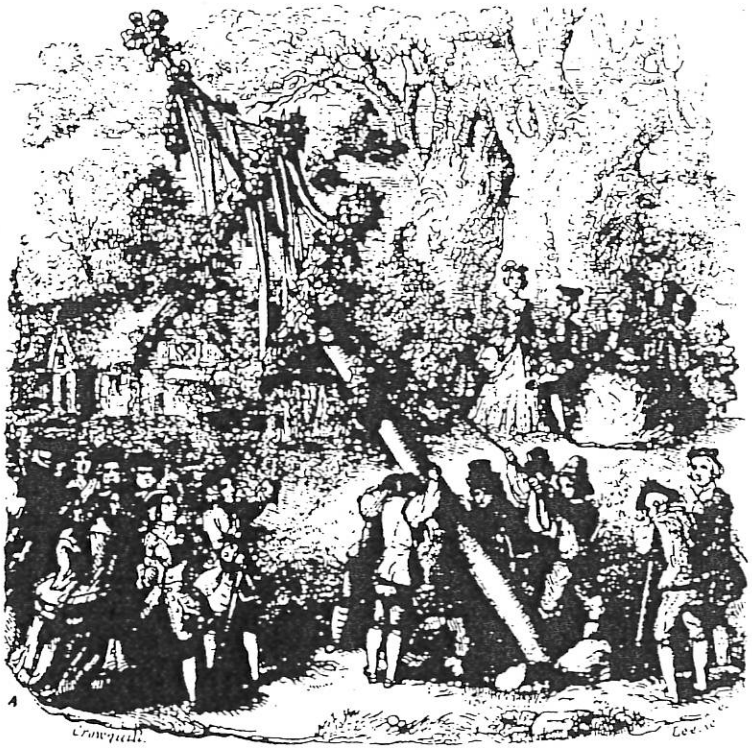
Merry Mount became a refuge for Indians, the discontented, gay people, runaway servants, and what the governor called "all the scume of the countrie." When the authorities reminded him that his actions violated the King's Proclamation, Morton replied that it was "no law." Miles Standish, whom Morton called "Mr. Shrimp," attacked. The **Maypole** was cut down. The settlement was burned. Morton's goods were confiscated, he was chained in the bilboes, and ostracized to England aboard the ship "The Gift," at a cost the Puritans complained of of twelve pounds seven shillings. The rainbow coalition of Merry Mount was thus destroyed for the time being. That Merry Mount

A PORTABLE MAYPOLE

BASE: Using a full sheet of plywood (4' X 8'):1) Cut it in half. 2) Cut off all corners of each of the two resulting sheets so that you end up with two symetrical octagonal panels: a Top and Bottom. 3) Cut a hole the size of the diameter of the maypole in the center of the Top Panel. 4) Cut and nail 2' X 8's along the middle of the bottom base (leave room for setting of the maypole). 5) Cut and nail 2' X 8's along the edges of the Base Panel. 6) Nail the Top Panel to the new base.

POLE: Using two 10' lengths of 4" plastic pipe, A and B: 1) Glue a coupling to Pipe A. 2) Glue a cap to Pipe B and secure a screw eye to it. 3) Bolt a fitting to bottom of Base (inside of it so that Pipe can later be fitted into it). 4) When ready to use attach ribbons to screw eye and fit pipes together and into base.





RAISING OF THE MAY-POLE

later (1636) became associated with Anne Hutchinson, the famous mid-wife, spiritualist, and feminist, surely was more than coincidental. Her brother-in-law ran the Chapel of Ease. She thought that god loved everybody, regardless of their sins. She doubted the Puritans' authority to make law. A statue of Robert Burns in Quincy, near to Merry Mount, quotes the poet's lines,

A fig for those by law protected!
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

Thomas Morton was a thorn in the side of the Boston and Plymouth Puritans, because he had an alternate vision of Massachusetts. He was impressed by its fertility; they by its scarcity. He befriended the Indians; they shuddered at the thought. He was egalitarian; they proclaimed themselves the "Elect." He freed servants; they lived off them. He armed the Indians; they used arms against Indians. To Nathaniel Hawthorne, the destiny of American settlement was decided at Merry Mount. Casting the struggle as mirth vs. gloom, grizzly saints vs. gay sinners, **green** vs. iron, it was the Puritans who won, and the fate of America was determined in favor of psalm-singing, Indian-scalpers whose notion of the **Maypole** was a whipping post.

Parts of the past live, parts die. The red cedar that drew Morton first to Merry Mount blew down in the gale of 1898. A section of it, about eight feet of its trunk, became a power

fetish in 1919, placed as it was next to the President's chair o the Quincy City Council. Interested parties may now view it i the Quincy Historical Museum. Living trees, however, hav since grown, despite the closure of the ship-yards.

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

In England the attacks on **May Day** were a necessary part o the wearisome, unending attempt to establish industrial worl discipline. The attempt was led by the Puritans with their belie that toil was godly and less toil wicked. Absolute surplus valu could be increased only by increasing the hours of labor an abolishing holydays. A parson wrote a piece of worl propaganda called Funebria Florae, Or the Downfall of the Ma Games. He attacked, *"ignorants, atheists, papists, drunkard swearers, swashbucklers, maid-marians, morrice-dancer maskers, mummers, Maypole stealers, health-drinker together with a rapscallion rout of fiddlers, fools fighter gamesters, lewd-women, light-women, contemmers magistracy, affronters of ministry, disobedients to parent misspenders of time, and abusers of the creature, &c."*

At about this time, Isaac Newton, the gravitationist an machinist of time, said work was a law of planets and apple alike. Thus work ceased to be merely the ideology of th Puritans, it became a law of the universe. In 1717 Newto purchased London's hundred foot Maypole and used it to prop u his telescope.

Chimney sweeps and dairy maids led the resistance. The sweeps dressed up as women on **May Day**, or put on aristocratic perriwigs. They sang songs and collected money. When the Earl of Bute in 1763 refused to pay, the opprobrium was so great that he was forced to resign. Milk maids used to go **a-Maying** by dressing in floral garlands, dancing, and getting the dairymen to distribute their milk-yield freely. Soot and milk workers thus helped to retain the holyday right into the industrial revolution.

The ruling class used the day for its own purposes. Thus, when Parliament was forced to abolish slavery in the British

MILK-MAIDS' DANCE ON MAY-DAY.

dominions, it did so on **May Day** 1807. In 1820 the Cato Street conspirators plotted to destroy the British cabinet while it was having dinner. Irish, Jamaican, and Cockney were hanged for the attempt on **May Day** 1820. A conspirator wrote his wife saying "justice and liberty have taken their flight ... to other distant shores." He meant America, where Boston Brahmin, Robber Baron, and Southern Plantocrat divided and ruled an arching rainbow of people.

Two bands of that rainbow came from English and Irish islands. One was **Green**. Robert Owen, union leader, socialist, and founder of utopian communities in America, announced the beginning of the millenium after **May Day** 1833. The other was **Red**. On **May Day** 1830, a founder of the Knights of Labor, the United Mine Workers of America, and the Wobblies was born in Ireland, Mary Harris Jones, a.k.a., "Mother Jones." She was a **Maia** of the American working class.

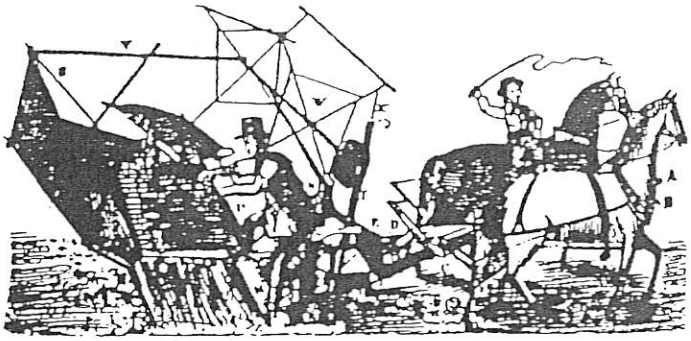
May Day continued to be commemorated in America, one way or another, despite the victory of the Puritans at Merry Mount. On **May Day** 1779 the revolutionaries of Boston confiscated the estates of *"enemies of Liberty."* On **May Day** 1808 *"twenty different dancing groups of the wretched Africans"* in New Orleans danced to the tunes of their own drums until sunset when the slave patrols showed themselves with their cutlasses. *"The principal dancers or leaders are dressed in a variety of wild and savage fashions, always ornamented with a number of tails of the small wild beasts."* observed a strolling white man.

THE RED: HAYMARKET CENTENNIAL

The history of the modern **May Day** originates in the center of the North American plains, at Haymarket, in Chicago – "the city on the make" – in **May** 1886. The **Red** side of that story is more well-known than the **Green**, because it was bloody. But there was also a **Green** side to the tale, though the **green** was not so much that of pretty grass garlands, as it was of greenbacks, for in Chicago, it was said, the dollar is king.

Of course the prairies are **green** in **May**. Virgin soil, dark, brown, crumbling, shot with fine black sand, it was the produce of thousands of years of humus and organic decomposition. For many centuries this earth was husbanded by the native Americans of the plains. As Black Elk said theirs is *"the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things: for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit."* From such a **green** perspective, the white men appeared as pharoahs, and indeed, as Abe Lincoln put it, these prairies were the "Egypt of the West."

The land was mechanized. Relative surplus value could only be obtained by reducing the price of food. The proteins and vitamins of this fertile earth spread through the whole world. Chicago was the jugular vein. Cyrus McCormick wielded the surgeon's knife. His mechanical reapers harvested the grasses and grains. McCormick produced 1,500 reapers in 1849; by 1884 he was producing 80,000. Not that McCormick actually



made reapers, members of the Molders Union Local 23 did that and on **May Day** 1867 they went on strike, starting the Eight Hour Movement.

A staggering transformation was wrought. It was "Farewell" to the hammer and sickle. "Goodby" to the cradle scythe. "So long" to Emerson's man with the hoe. These now became the artifacts of nostalgia and romance. It became: "Hello" to the hobo. "Move on" to the harvest stiffs. "Line up" the proletarians. Such were the new commands of civilization.

Thousands of immigrants, many from Germany, poured into Chicago after the Civil War. Class war was advanced technically and logistically. In 1855 the Chicago police used Gatling guns against the workers who protested the closing of the beer gardens. In the Bread Riot of 1872 the police clubbed hungry people in a tunnel under the river. In the 1877 railway strike, Federal troops fought workers at "The Battle of the Viaduct." These troops were recently seasoned from fighting the Sioux who had killed Custer. Henceforth, the defeated Sioux could only *"Go to a mountain top & cry for a vision."* The Pinkerton Detective Agency put visions into practice by teaching the city police how to spy and to form fighting columns for deployment in city streets. A hundred years ago during the street car strike, the police issued a shoot-to-kill order.

McCormick cut wages 15%. His profit rate was 71%. In **May** 1886 four molders whom McCormick locked-out were shot dead by the police. Thus, did this 'grim reaper' maintain his profits.

Nationally, **May** First 1886 was important because a couple of years earlier the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, "RESOLVED .... that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor, from and after **May** 1, 1886.

On 4 **May** 1886 several thousand people gathered near Haymarket Square to hear what August Spies, a newspaperman, had to say about the shootings at the McCormick works. Albert Parsons, a typographer and labor leader spoke next. Later, at his trial, he said, "What is Socialism or Anarchism? Briefly stated it is the right of the toilers to the free and equal use of the tools of production and the right of the producers to their product." He was follwed by "Good-Natured Sam" Fielden who as a child had worked in the textile factories of Lancashire, England. He was a Methodist preacher and labor organizer. He got done speaking at 10:30 PM. At that time 176 policemen charged the crowd that had dwindled to about 200. An unknown hand threw a stick of dynamite, the first time that Alfred Nobel's invention was used in class battle.

All hell broke lose, many were killed, and the rest is history.

"Make the raids first and look up the law afterwards," was the Sheriff's dictum. It was followed religiously across the country. Newspapers screamed for blood, homes were ransaked, and suspects were subjected to the 'third degree.' Eight men were railroaded in Chicago at a farcical trial. Four men hanged on "Black Friday," 11 November 1887.

"There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today," said Spies before he choked.

MAY DAY SINCE 1886

Lucy Parsons, widowed by Chicago's "just-us," was born in Texas. She was partly Afro-American, partly native American, and partly Hispanic. She set out to tell the world the true story "of one whose only crime was that he lived in advance of his time." She went to England and encouraged English workers to make **May Day** an international holiday for shortening the hours of work. Her friend, William Morris, wrote a poem called "**May Day**:"

WORKERS

They are few, we are many: and yet, O our Mother,
Many years were we wordless and nought was our deed,
But now the word flitteth from brother to brother:
We have furrowed the acres and scattered the seed.

EARTH

Win on then unyielding, through fair and foul weather,
And pass not a day that your deed shall avail.
And in hope every spring-tide come gather together
That unto the Earth ye may tell all your tale.

Her work was not in vain. **May Day**, or "The Day of the Chicago Martyrs" as it is still called in Mexico "belongs to the working class and is dedicated to the revolution," as Eugene Debs put it in his **May Day** editorial of 1907. The A. F. of L. declared it a holiday. Sam Gompers sent an emissary to Europe to have it proclaimed an international labor day. Both the Knights of Labor and the Second International officially adopted the day. Bismarck, on the other hand, outlawed **May Day**. President Grover Cleveland announed that the first Monday in September would be Labor Day in America, as he tried to divide the international working class. Huge numbers were out of work, and they began marching. Under the generalship of Jacob Coxey they descended on Washington D.C. on **May Day** 1894, the first big march on Washington. Two years later across the world Lenin wrote an important **May Day** pamphlet for the Russian factory workers in 1896. The Russian Revolution of 1905 began on **May Day**.

With the success of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution the Red side of **May Day** became scarlet, crimson, for ten million people were slaughtered in World War I. The end of the war brought work stoppings, general strikes, and insurrections all over the world, from Mexico to Kenya, from China to France. In Boston on **May Day** 1919 the young telephone workers threatened to strike, and 20,000 workers in Lawrence went on strike again for the 8-hour day. There were fierce clashes between working people and police in Cleveland as well as in other cities on **May Day** of that year. A lot of socialists, anarchists, bolsheviks, wobblies and other "I-Won't-Workers," ended up in jail as a result.

This didn't get them down. At "Wire City," as they called the federal pen at Fort Leavenworth, there was a grand parade and no work on **May Day** 1919. Pictures of Lenine and Lincoln were tied to the end of broom sticks and held aflot. There were speeches and songs. The Liberator supplies us with an account of the day, but it does not tell us who won the Wobbly-Socialist horseshoe throwing contest. Nor does it tell us what happened to the soldier caught waving a red ribbon from the guards' barracks. Meanwhile, one mile underground in the copper mines of Bisbee where there are no national boundaries, Spanish-speaking Americans were singing "The International" on **May Day**.

Lucy Parsons in 1886

In the 1920s and 1930s the day was celebrated by union organizers, the unemployed, and determined workers. In New York City the big **May Day** celebration was held in Union Square. In the 1930s Lucy Parsons marched in Chicago at May Day with her young friend, Studs Terkel. May Day 1946 the Arabs began a general strike in Palestine, and the Jews of the Displaced Persons Camps in Landsberg, Germany, went on hunger strike. On **May Day** 1947 auto workers in Paris downed tools, an insurrection in Paraguay broke out, the Mafia killed six **May Day** marchers in Sicily, and the Boston Parks Commissioner said that this was the first year in living memory when neither Communist nor Socialists had applied for a permit to rally on the Common.

1968 was a good year for **May Day**. Allen Ginsberg was made the "Lord of Misrule" in Prague before the Russians got there. In London hundreds of students lobbied Parliament against a bill to stop Third World immigration into England. In Mississippi police could not prevent 350 Black students from supporting their jailed friends. At Columbia University thousands of students petitioned against armed police on campus. In Detroit with the help of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, the first wildcat strike in fifteen years took place at the Hamtramck Assembly plant (Dodge Main), against speed-up. In Cambridge, Mass., Black leaders advocated police reforms, while in New York the Mayor signed a bill providing the police with the most sweeping "emergency" powers known in American history. The climax to the '68 Mai was reached in France where there was a gigantic General Strike under strange slogans such as

Parlez à vos voisins!
L'imagination prend le pouvoir!
Dessous les pavés c'est la plage!

AN ENDING

Where is the **Red** and **Green** today? Is it in Mao's Red Book? or in Col. Khadafy's Green Book? Some perhaps. Leigh Hunt, the English essayist of the 19th century, wrote that May Day is *"the union of the two best things in the world, the love of nature, and the love of each other."* Certainly, such **green** union is possible, because we all can imagine it, and we know that what is real now was once only imagined. Just as certainly, that union can be realized only by **red** struggle, because there is no gain without pain, as the aerobiticians say, or no dreams without responsibility, no birth without labor, no **green** without **red**.

The children used to celebrate **May Day**. I think schools stopped encouraging them sometime around when "Law Day" was created, but I'm not sure. A correspondent from East Arlington, Mass., writes that in the late 1940s, *"On any given Saturday in May, anywhere from 10-30 children would dress up in crepe paper costumes (hats, shirts, &c.); we would pick baskets of flowers and parade up and down several streets (until the flowers ran out!) The whole time we would be chanting,* ***May Party, May Party, rah, rah, rah!*** *A leader would be chosen, but I don't remember how. (Probably by throwing fingers out). Then, we would parade up to Spy Pond at the edge of the Center off Lake Street and have a picnic lunch."* This correspondent now teaches kindergarten. *"In recent years,"* she continues, *"I have always decorated a* ***May Pole*** *for my kindergarten class (they do the decorations actually), and we would dance around it. It would always attract attention from the older children."*